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THE DUTIES OF A SUPERINTENDENT AS REGARDS STATE REGISTRATION¹

By ANNA C. STRUCKMYER, R.N.

Greenville, Mississippi

I wish that it might be my privilege to tell something new on this all important subject, that there is a very definite duty on the part of a superintendent is conceded by all, but of what it consists seems to be largely a matter of conjecture. It would seem that when a superintendent has fulfilled all her obligations towards a pupil in a general way, her obligations towards state registration have been met.

The superintendent's duty begins with the applicant, because the applicant of today is the registered nurse of tomorrow, and to pay no attention to the material which is taken in hand to train for the serious profession of nursing, would be like putting up a beautiful building without a foundation.

A good nurse must be, to begin with, a good woman and a woman who is willing to give up cherished ideas of a narrow margin, to make way for a wider view of things.

I am not, arbitrarily, an advocate of a high school diploma as an entrance requirement, but am very much in favor of giving the two words "or equivalent," which most states have appended to their stated requirements, full scope, especially if the personality of the applicant gives evidence that such equivalent means years probably spent in self denial, self development and in gaining a broader knowledge of the world and its ways than a recent high school graduate can possibly possess. Such an applicant, if she has common sense, trustworthiness, truthfulness, and honesty will eventually make a far more capable nurse and be of more assistance to the physician than the young woman who has a higher preliminary education, but who cannot be relied upon, and is irresponsible in her attitude towards the serious life she is entering.

But if the nursing profession is to occupy the place it rightfully deserves among the professions, education must be considered.

I feel sure that every one present knows and is willing to admit that the light of a state law being thrown on the schools of nursing in the various states has brought forth conditions nothing short of

¹ Read at the sixth annual meeting of the Mississippi State Association of Graduate Nurses, October 30, 1916.

disgraceful. Young women with more than ordinary ambition were taken into these schools and were asked to perform the many menial tasks which go to nursing patients and establishing hospital routine, with all too little theory to lighten them. The diploma which these schools awarded was merely an evidence of a specified term of service being ended.

This no one can tell more about than the members of the various state boards. They know that the simplest requirements in filling out the state registration papers presented difficulties almost insurmountable to many of the applicants for registration. This may not determine the status of the nurse, still it seems natural to wonder with how much intelligence she might interpret a physician's orders.

Each state has its peculiar needs and as the state boards of examiners are made up largely of women representative of their profession and thoroughly acquainted with every phase of the work in their state, the course outlined by them should be accepted, and the nurses fitted to pass an examination in every branch. The curriculum of a training school as prescribed by the state board will give evidence of the view the members of said board take. The broader their mind, the more nearly the curriculum will be one which can be met by all the responsible schools in the state. "Hitch your wagon to a star" is a motto which has been an inspiration to many, but to fix the state requirements a great distance beyond the present day pupils in the schools, doesn't show good judgment, as it must create a feeling of dissatisfaction among pupils and leave them with a feeling that somewhere or somehow they have not been fairly dealt with.

A woman who is good material for a nurse will want the stamp of approval from her state, which is a registration certificate, and it should be possible for her to gain it by conscientious effort.

A pupil nurse should be thoroughly informed on the subject of state registration; it should not be used as a whip, and most importance attached to the examination, but it should be pictured most emphatically as just what it is, the greatest means for bringing nursing forward and securing for it, its stand among the professions.

Nursing is admittedly a woman's work, it is the one profession where men are out of the running, not because any effort is made to keep them out, but because they instinctively feel out of their sphere. Therefore we must show that women are qualified to make the most of an opportunity, and what more could we want to work with than the most precious gifts our nation has in its possession, its life and its health.

Some of the best writers on the subject say there is something wrong

with the nurse of today, some say she is overtrained, some say she is mercenary and still others find various other shortcomings.

Could there be such a thing as overtraining? I am afraid these critics mean trained away from the fundamental essentials.

In reading the history of nursing, as our own Miss Nutting and Miss Dock have gathered it from numberless sources, one comes across this little sentence: "Nor is this all, the whole development of modern secular nursing which now encircles the entire globe traces its genealogy through Florence Nightingale, its direct founder, to Kaiserswerth and its training school, for it was there that Miss Nightingale went to study nursing system and method when she was preparing unconsciously, it may be, for her revolutionary reforms in hospital nursing and organization." And later on in the same volume we find that the keynote of the teaching of Mother Fliedner, the guiding spirit of the little deaconess hospital, is expressed in a few words from a German poet, "Never sacrifice the 'soul' of the work for its technique." If this tone still endured, and every woman in the profession made it her own, I am sure complaints about nurses would soon cease. Registration, in demanding a higher order of woman, will automatically raise the ethical standard.

When every phase of state registration as concerning the pupil nurse has been discussed, the most important thought remaining is that there is a decided interdependence between the two. Those directly concerned with state registration must be considerate of the pupil nurse, and her problems must be made the subject of conscientious study. The pupil nurse must be taught that to see her highest hopes fulfilled, it will be necessary for her to support state registration. And then when the superintendent feels that she has as nearly as possible fulfilled her technical obligations, let her not forget Mother Fliedner's admonition, but also give the "soul" of the work some consideration by calling the attention of the pupil nurses to such words as the following by Mary Stewart: "Keep us, O God, from pettiness; let us be large in thought, in word, in deed. . . . Teach us to put into action our better impulses, straightforward and unafraid."